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ABSTRACT

Based on interviews with more than 50 individuals at television stations, colleges, and publishing companies, as well as on a review of existing literature, this report summarizes the "state of the art" in telecourse use and makes recommendations for future research efforts. This document is part of a series of instructional materials funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for use in a 2-day seminar to aid college and university administrators and station executives in making effective decisions about the use and implementation of telecourses. (Author/LLS)

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# TELECOURSES: REFLECTIONS '80 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# I.
# INTRODUCTION

The report "Telecourses: Reflections '80" was developed for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's Station-College Executive Project in Adult Learning. Based on interviews with more than 50 individuals (at television stations, colleges, and publishers), as well as on a review of existing literature, the report summarizes the "state of the art" in telecourse use and makes recommendations for future research efforts.

This document and its companion pieces, "Working with Telecourses" and "An Administrator's Guide to Telecourses," serve as the basis for workshops of public broadcasters and higher education administrators.

# II.
# TELECOURSES: DEFINITION AND SCOPE

A telecourse is an integrated learning system that employs both television and print materials. These media are designed to provide the student with a complete educational unit in the convenience of his or her home. The basic components of a telecourse include a series of television programs, a textbook, a study guide, and a book of readings. Other components often included are test banks, a publicity kit, and other information for use at the discretion of the offering institution.

Telecourses may be developed specifically *for* television (such as *Psychology* and *American Government*), or they may be developed *from* an existing television series (such as *The Ascent of Man* and *The Shakespeare Plays*). This second type is often referred to as a "wraparound" course. Wraparound courses are more likely to be broadcast in desirable time periods, whereas courses *for* television are more likely to be broadcast in fringe times or to be relegated to nonbroadcast distribution.

# III.
# TELECOURSES:
# THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Colleges and universities use telecourses in a variety of ways. Such courses may be treated as part of the regular college curriculum, as part of a "College Without Walls" approach, or as part of an evening college or continuing education division on a credit or noncredit basis.

Use of television in education appears to be widespread. Most (70–80%) public television stations report that they broadcast credit and noncredit courses suitable for adult education. Major telecourse producers estimate they have reached over 600 colleges and universities within the United States.

Stations treat telecourse programs much as they do other programs. Educational institutions, on the other hand, must expend a certain amount of effort in making use of such courses.

In one survey, 36% of junior and community colleges stated they used television for off-campus instruction, and another survey found that close to 34% of state universities and colleges used television courses as a part of an "open learning" or external degree program.

# IV.
# TELECOURSES:
# THE AUDIENCE

There appears to be no single telecourse audience. It is likely that different audiences are attracted to different colleges and to different types of telecourses. The four main categories of telecourses are (1) Continuing Professional Education (e.g., *Behavior in the Classroom, Assessing Chronic Dysentery*); (2) General Interest (e.g., *The Ascent of Man, Designing Home Interiors*); (3) Core Requirement (e.g., *American Government, Psychology I*); and (4) Other (e.g., G.E.D., workshops, noncredit courses).

At the two-year college level, the "typical" telecourse student tends to be slightly older than on-campus students, is more apt to be female than male, is in a middle to upper income bracket, is most likely studying part-time, is employed or with children, and has had some college. Up to 70% of telecourse students at this level take on-campus courses as well as telecourses.

Very little data are available from four-year institutions, but a general impression from respondents indicates an audience that may be slightly older and more predominantly female. Most telecourses at these institutions are offered through Continuing Education or Extension divisions and students are unlikely to be enrolled in on-campus courses at the same time.

Appeal of telecourses to students appears to be affected by five main factors: (1) relationship to the student's vocational advancement, (2) relationship to degree requirements, (3) screen presence of a well-known individual, (4) cost to the student, and (5) convenience to the student.

Stations have little locally generated information on audiences for most telecourses, but they believe that there are viewers for each series above and beyond enrolled students. Little is known about this sizeable number of nonenrolled viewers.

Surveys designed to identify the needs of adult education have not been very effective because there is a gap between people's expression of interest in courses and their actual participation.

Possible future audiences for telecourses include professional groups, the elderly, minorities, Spanish-speaking individuals, prisoners, and upper-division students.

# V.
# TELECOURSE ADOPTION

The telecourse adoption process differs for wraparound courses and for courses made *for* television.

Technically, stations do not "adopt" a telecourse. They broadcast a telecourse series. It is the colleges that adopt telecourses by deciding to provide support services, to evaluate student performance, and to award credit.

In the case of a wraparound series, *stations* usually decide to air the program on the basis of general audience appeal, cost, and other factors that normally enter into programming decisions. Educational potential is not usually a major factor. In the case of a course *for* television, the station's decision to allot time usually reflects the degree to which the station works closely with local colleges and the manner in which potential courses match station programming philosophy and other series being aired. Stations usually allot a certain amount of time for such programming, and it is the colleges that decide which specific courses will be aired, particularly if the colleges have paid to lease the programs.

*Colleges* have two major decision points in telecourses: (1) the initial decision to use telecourses as a form of education; and (2) the decision to offer a particular telecourse. In many cases the initial decision to use telecourses "just happens," often because of the interest of a single administrator or faculty member. Decisions on specific telecourse adoptions are usually based on an examination of availability, quality, perceived needs, potential enrollments, and costs.

Colleges have the additional responsibility for establishing policies about the relationship of telecourses to the rest of the institution. They must make decisions about the administration of the courses, the responsibilities of those involved, the compensation of telecourse faculty, the financing of telecourses, registration procedures, and the status of telecourse students.

The lack of adequate lead time in obtaining information about a course is often a problem for colleges, particularly in offering wraparound courses. It has been recommended that the initial commitment to air a series be made at least seven months in advance in order to satisfy the needs of most educational institutions.

# VI.
# THE ECONOMICS OF TELECOURSES

The costs of telecourses are viewed differently by the producer, the station, the college, the student, and the publisher.

Producers can invest from under a hundred thousand dollars to over a million dollars for a course designed especially for television. Programs on which wraparound courses are based usually cost several million dollars; however, producing educational institutions pay only for the development and marketing of the support materials for these courses. Returns to telecourse producers come from sale/lease of programs, institutional fees, and book sales.

Costs to the user station include staff time, handling, transmission costs, publicity, and other related expenses.

Costs to user colleges include faculty salaries, nonteaching staff time, print materials, publicity, computer expenses, and other related expenses.

Costs that are absorbed by either the station or the college include rental or lease of programs, air time, purchasing of tape stock, dubbing of tapes, evaluation, and consortial fees.

Student costs include tuition, books and materials, travel expenses, and time.

The most important economic factors for colleges seem to be the availability of state support (or FTE) for telecourses, the availability of free air time rather than payment for air time, the presence of competition, and membership in a consortium.

This study found that, in general, two-year colleges do better financially on telecourses than do four-year institutions.

# VII.
# STUDENT SERVICES

Student services, which are particularly important for telecourses, differ in kind and quality from those offered for on-campus courses. Colleges provide most of the support services for students. These services include flexible registration procedures (such as phone-in and mail-in registration and open registration until after the first programs have been aired), flexible examination schedules and locations, easy access to books and materials, systematic phoning of all enrolled students, discussion and review sessions, periodic quizzes, library privileges, access to program videotapes, academic advisement, and computer support services.

Station contact with students is limited, but services can include responding to inquiries by referring students to participating colleges, promoting telecourses with on-air announcements, and limiting telecourse preemptions.

There seems to be no consensus on the best times to air telecourses. Wraparound series are usually scheduled in prime time (8–11 p.m.). Courses *for* television are usually scheduled in the early morning (6–8 a.m.), in late afternoon (3–6 p.m.), very late at night (11–12 p.m.), or on weekends.

# VIII.
# MARKETING, PUBLICITY, AND PROMOTION — INFORMING THE PUBLIC

One rule of thumb seems to apply to promotion of telecourses: Assuming that budgets are well spent, the greater the amount of publicity, the greater the enrollment. Beyond that, neither colleges nor stations have solid data on the cost-effectiveness of specific types of promotion.

Targeted mailings are considered by many institutions to be the most effective promotion technique. Blanket mailings, especially for community colleges that serve well-defined geographical areas, have also proved effective. Some institutions achieve satisfying results with newspaper ads; others do not. On-air spots seem to be a part of most promotional campaigns.

Although most stations air telecourse announcements and advise colleges on promotion, they believe that telecourse promotion is primarily the colleges' responsibility.

# IX.
# INTERACTION OF TELEVISION STATIONS AND COLLEGES

Patterns of station-college interaction vary according to the attitudes, funding sources, and philosophies of the two organizations. Colleges have certain expectations of the stations: they want adequate air time, technical capability, minimal preempting, help on promotion, and reasonable costs. In turn, stations expect colleges to understand air time restraints, to cooperate in scheduling of telecourses, and (where applicable) to deliver tapes on time and in good condition.

Successful telecourse operation requires cooperation and communication between station and college; such interaction could be enhanced by the designation of one person within each organization to act as liaison. Among problems shared by both stations and colleges that could be solved by cooperation are advance scheduling of PBS series and the financing of telecourse programs.

# X.
# FACTORS THAT HELP OR HINDER STATION-COLLEGE CONSORTIA SERVING ADULT LEARNERS

One way to defray costs and pool resources is to form college and university consortia for the purpose of offering telecourses. However, consortia can also pose problems in administration, finance, and working relationships.

Dr. Penelope Richardson of USC has studied nine telecourse consortia and has outlined eight factors that seem to contribute to a consortium's success:

1. Learner-centered focus — the total teaching-learning system is built on the needs of the "distant learner."
2. Commitment of leaders — they must believe in the value of the telecourse and make a personal commitment to it.
3. Clear purposes and a strong governance system — relationships and responsibilities must be clearly delineated and a management system must be developed to implement decisions.
4. Stability — firm financial and legal bases permit long-range planning and development.
5. High-quality instructional materials — materials must have learner appeal, sound academic content, good instructional design, and high production quality.
6. Positive station-college relationship — the relationship must be based on mutual self-interest and respect, on an understanding of each other's priorities and constraints, and on a shared commitment to the learner.
7. A system for sharing resources and information — there must be a clearinghouse for providing resources, expertise, and political support from one level of governance to another.
8. Supportive context for distance learning — policies at the local, state, and federal level must facilitate access to learning resources and flexibility of their use.

# XI.
# TELECOURSES: BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

Telecourses can provide major benefits to both colleges and stations. Among the benefits to colleges are exposure to new populations of potential students (including some who subsequently register for on-campus courses), flexible scheduling, alternative learning approaches, and, in some cases, the ability to generate income.

Major benefits to stations include reaching new audiences, providing a public service, and increasing the diversity of programming.

However, telecourses can cause problems as well. At the colleges, they can pose a threat to faculty members, since instructors have less control over the content and material in the course and are often relegated to the role of resource person or adviser rather than being the main source of content. In addition, telecourse enrollments are often more difficult to predict than on-campus course enrollments. Two additional problems were lack of suitable available courses and the administrative time needed to operate telecourses.

Stations are often confronted by a lack of sufficient air time to meet all the requests to broadcast telecourses. Some station representatives feel that colleges are unreasonable in their expectations for air time. Furthermore, telecourses can require substantial amounts of staff time at public television stations, which tend to be understaffed as it is.

# XII.
# TELECOURSES: SUCCESS OR FAILURE AND HOW DO YOU TELL?

The success of telecourses can be judged from a number of different perspectives — those of the students, the faculty, college administrators, and station executives. Unfortunately systematic efforts to evaluate telecourses have been the exception rather than the rule, and those evaluations that have been conducted have suffered from low response rates.

Studies do seem to indicate that students learn from telecourses, that they like the courses, and that they plan to enroll in future courses. However, not as many re-enroll as say they will.

Faculty members are less enthusiastic about telecourses. One study found that faculty members prefer on-campus courses over telecourses because the latter limit their contact with students. However, most faculty members in the study indicated a willingness to teach other telecourses.

College administrators are primarily concerned about size of enrollments in telecourses, especially since a number of institutions have reported declines in telecourse enrollments in the past few years. However, few colleges have gathered sufficient data to support this complaint or to permit comparisons between telecourse and on-campus enrollments and the consequent costs per student.

Station executives are most concerned about audience size and balanced programming schedules. With the exception of wraparound courses, most telecourses do not draw large audiences, although they do provide programming diversity.

# XIII.
# ALTERNATE DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Actual and potential telecourse audiences are largest for telecourses delivered by open-air broadcast. However, alternate delivery systems offer opportunities to reach new audiences and to provide current audiences with additional educational services and increased options.

Some alternative delivery systems, such as electronic blackboard and ITFS (Instructional Television Fixed Service), are intended for use with groups of students in real time and at fixed sites. Other systems, such as videotape, videodisc, cable TV, stand-alone computers, and computer terminals, are intended for home or other nonclassroom use. Satellites are usually used in conjunction with other technologies to provide interconnection, flexibility, and program diversity.

Alternative delivery systems can increase the amount of broadcast time available for telecourses, can encourage educational innovation (such as two-way communication and programmed instruction), and can provide the student with greater control.

The greatest flexibility is provided by those systems that can be used by the student at home or in learning centers. However, these systems usually require the student to have appropriate equipment and materials, which can be expensive.

Costs for each system must be evaluated in terms of the number of students served, installation expenses, and costs of program preparation and delivery.

# XIV.
# THE FUTURE

Telecourses have a solid future. Further, alternative delivery systems will increase the educator's ability to reach nontraditional students in nontraditional ways, and the TV generation will increasingly use telecommunications for informal learning.

However, questions of academic, technical, financial, and administrative responsibility for integrated uses of these media must be resolved in order for this future to be achieved.